



# Ikebana 101

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## PARTS:

- Flowers (1)  
*branches, greenery.*
- Containers (1)  
*that complement the plant materials.*
- Frogs (1)  
*aka pin holders. "Frogs" are used in flower arranging to secure plants at the base. Pin frogs look like a little bed of nails; cage frogs support larger stems.*
- Scissors (1)  
*make sure that these are sharp.*
- Water (1)

## SUMMARY

Though we can't go into all the technical rules of ikebana here, (and I don't adhere to them myself), I do want to inspire you to look at flowers with a discerning eye, to find unusual lines in an arrangement, and to develop a sense of poetic importance. It is the beauty of a moment, or the perfection of a natural scene, that should be captured in ikebana, the same way those things could be captured in a haiku.

Ikebana is known as the art of Japanese flower arranging, but the word literally means the arrangement of plant materials. This means the artist is not limited only to the showy and

colorful blooms of traditional Western florists.

Monks from ancient times offered flowers at temples, and just as bonsai developed as a discipline, ikebana has also evolved. There are many styles, but the two most commonly seen are moribana and nageire. Moribana means “piled up,” and this style is presented in low, shallow containers. Nageire arrangements, translated as “thrown in,” are made in tall vases. One basic premise of ikebana is the idea that the arrangement symbolizes heaven, mankind, and earth, each of which is represented by different elements in the arrangement.

Many rules govern the schools of ikebana, dictating the height of stems, types of containers, and even the angles at which stems can be placed. These rules are important, but even the novice can benefit from working with plants and flowers in the ikebana style.

## **Step 1 — Glossary of terms.**



- **Moribana:** Meaning "piled up." These arrangements are designed in wide, shallow containers. There are two common styles of Moribana: upright and slanting.
- **Nagerie:** Meaning "thrown in." Nagerie arrangements are made in tall, narrow vases. As with Moribana, there can be upright and slanting Nagerie.
- **Kenzan:** The tool used to support stems inside the container. The pinholder tool is the most commonly used, and generally has a weighted base with dozens of sharp pins sticking upwards. The branch or stem is pressed into the kenzan, and the pins hold it in place. Traditionally kenzan are never secured to the base of the container with anything other than natural plant matter or weights, meaning no glue, no floral tape, no putty.
- **Shin, Soe, and Hikae:** In the Sogestu School of Ikebana, the rules upon which this article is loosely based, shin, soe, and hikae are the terms for the 3 main pieces of an arrangement. Shin is the longest branch, and represents heaven; soe is the medium branch and represents man; and hikae is the shortest and represents the Earth.

- **Jushi:** Jushi are any flowers or leaves that do not make up the 3 main placements. They are meant to complement the shin, soe, and hikae. Add as many jushi as you like, but only in odd numbers.

## Step 2 — Gather or purchase plant materials.



- Give the flowers a fresh cut underwater, at an angle. Remove any damaged leaves, and any that might get tangled under the water. Keep the flowers away from drafts, heaters, or direct sunlight until you're ready to use them.

### Step 3 — Select a container.



- Containers are secondary to the flowers, and they should complement the design without overpowering the complete image. You might want to have a few containers on hand and choose one after you've begun your design.

### Step 4 — Familiarize yourself with the frog.



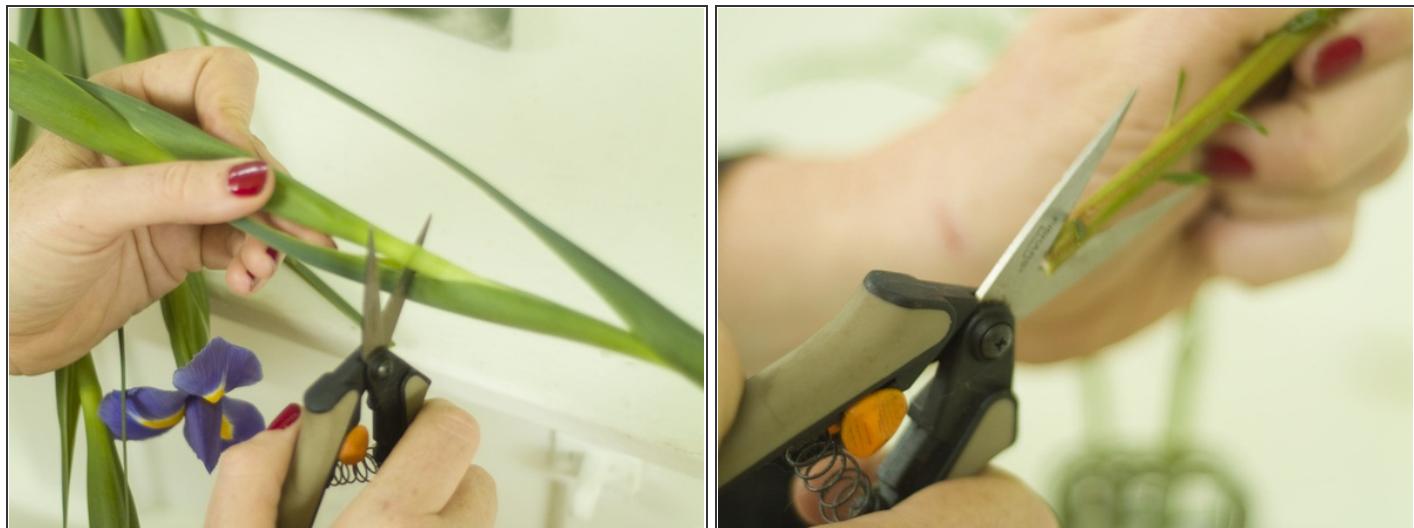
- The traditional type of frog used in modern ikebana is a pin holder. They're available in many different gauges and thicknesses. Practice cutting flower stems and setting them on the pins. Getting the flower to stand on the frog takes patience, but is easily learned. Cage-type frogs are useful for thicker branches and stems that are very wide, and they're a bit easier to work with.

## Step 5 — Let the plants and flowers inspire your design.



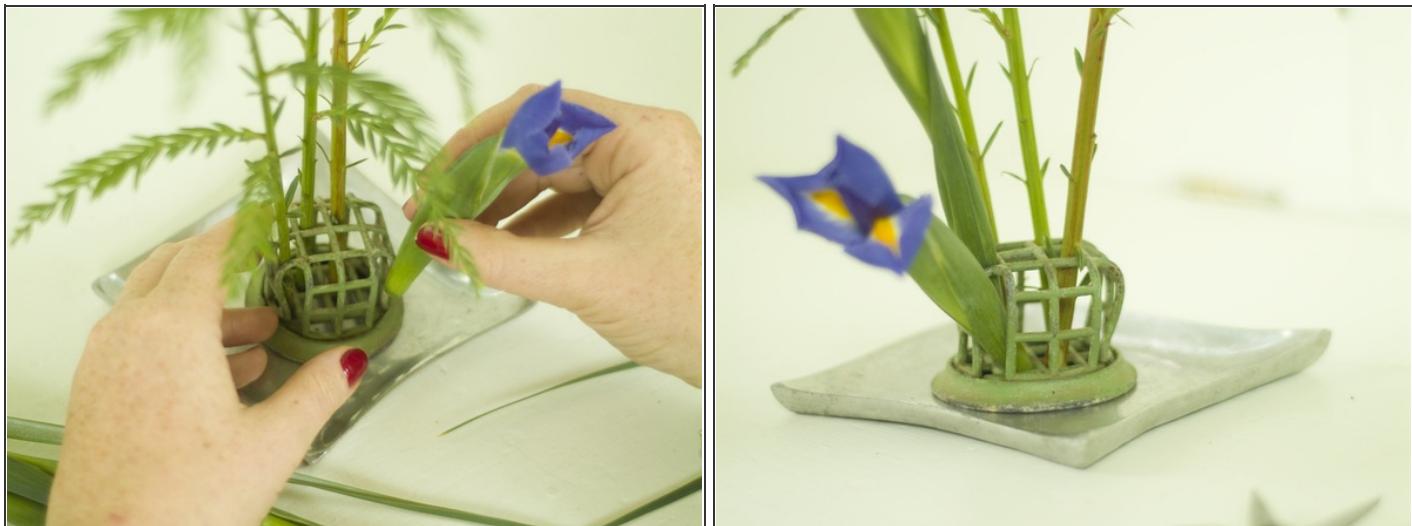
- Before you begin your arrangement, look at the flowers for inspiration. Their form might suggest a season, a landscape, or a haiku. Finding this direction and letting the form of the blossom or stem guide you is the key to learning ikebana.
- Don't get caught up in the flowers themselves; rather, let your mind flow with the feelings that your branches and flowers evoke. Often the awkward bend in a branch is the most beautiful part, but you might have to remove leaves or offshoots to see it. Where Western flower arrangement emphasizes conventional beauty and bright colors, the art of ikebana requires you to look beyond the surface.

## Step 6 — Cut.



- Once you've decided on a design, re-cut any flowers bluntly, instead of on the diagonal. This will help them sit in the frog. Cut branches about  $1\frac{1}{2}$ " up from the bottom, for better water intake.

### Step 7 — Arrange.



- Set the branches and flowers into the frog, and carefully position them. Work slowly, and never lose sight of your theme. When a branch won't stand straight in the frog, you have to learn to change your approach. If you cut a stem too short, go back to the beginning and rework everything. Force yourself to stay true to your vision, but be adaptable.

### Step 8 — Finishing touches.



- Complete your arrangement by adding water to the container and, if you like, covering the frog with leaves, more flowers, or mosses.

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